

issued earlier, an act the Democrats deemed irresponsible because it required the issuance of certificates of indebtedness.

In conclusion, there is no documentary evidence to indicate that the municipal government of Wilmington in 1897-1898 engaged in open activities that could be labeled as corrupt, or that the men in control engaged in, or deliberately allowed, situations to exist that were detrimental to the city. As the racial issue heated up, the Fusionists, particularly the black members, became more withdrawn and more reticent to answer publicly the charges thrown at them. Democrats took advantage of the opportunity to claim that the blacks and their allies thus had something to hide, and rapidly the situation became a matter not of what was the entire truth but what the mass of people believed to be true. In his memoirs, Furnifold Simmons offered some insight into the political climate of 1898:

We [Democrats] soon aroused great enthusiasm. We cowed the enemies, and we were in a position to rout them.... Suddenly, the venality, the corruption in office, the extravagance, the speculation of funds, and the miserable scandals...passed out of the public mind, and in a whirl of indignation which burst forth like the lava from a pent-up volcano, there was thrust to the front the absorbing and paramount issue of WHITE SUPREMACY.

III. Was there a rise in the crime rate in Wilmington prior to November 10, 1898? How many buildings or businesses were destroyed during the course of the riot on that date?

First, it is necessary to note that there exists an extensive bibliography on the subject. Time permitted an examination of only a small fraction of the source materials. Reference to the footnotes in secondary works will lead an interested reader to other sources. These sources include speeches and firsthand narratives, reports filed in the days following by newspaper reporters, and retellings and analysis by several generations of historians and other commentators. Taken as a whole, these views constitute a multiplicity of voices and opinions.

Crime

Readers of newspapers in Wilmington and across eastern North Carolina in 1898 could not escape the focus which editors, in news columns and editorials alike, placed on criminal acts, particularly those perpetrated by blacks. George Rountree, Wilmington attorney, Democrat, and ally of those advocating the overthrow of the Fusionist town government, recalled that ‘each issue of the paper spoke of burglaries which had been committed and lawlessness was rife, and especially were there references to disorderly conduct on the part of irresponsible Negroes.’”